EXTENT OF IOTC CATCHES SUBJECT TO CPC-SPECIFIC CATCH LIMITS

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Summary

This paper examines the extent to which catches of yellowfin tuna (YFT), bigeye tuna (BET), skipjack tuna (SKJ) and swordfish (SWO) are subject to CPC-specific catch limits under existing and recently adopted IOTC Conservation and Management Measures.

During 2022–2025, an average of around 54% of YFT catches was taken by fleets subject to individual catch limits, compared with approximately 75% for BET during 2024–2025.

Applying the catch-limit frameworks established for 2026–2028 to the average distribution of catches among fleets during 2022–2025 suggests that:

- For YFT, the proportion of catches associated with fleets subject to individual limits would increase from approximately 64% in 2026 to 73% from 2027, under Resolution 26/01.
- For BET, this proportion would reach approximately 82% in 2026–2027 and 86% in 2028.
- For SKJ, approximately 85% of catches would be associated with fleets subject to individual limits in 2026–2027, increasing to 88% in 2028.
- For SWO, individual limits will apply from 2027, covering fleets accounting for approximately 80% of recent catches.

These estimates reflect the recent distribution of catches among fleets and do not represent projections of future catches. Their applicability is also subject to the entry into force of the relevant measures and the effects of objections.

For TCAC, the findings illustrate that a substantial proportion of catches is already subject, or expected to become subject, to CPC-specific limits, although the extent varies among species and some catches remain outside these limits. The existing measures explicitly do not pre-empt or prejudice future decisions concerning the allocation of fishing opportunities.

Introduction

At the request of the Chair of the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria (TCAC), this paper provides an overview of the extent to which catches of the main IOTC species currently subject to catch limits – yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*; YFT), bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*; BET), skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*; SKJ) and swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*; SWO) – are covered by limits established for individual Contracting Parties and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) under existing or recently adopted Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs).

The paper summarises the relevant measures and catch limits and assesses the proportion of recent catches taken by CPCs subject to these limits. For measures entering into application from 2027, the analysis also provides an indication of their expected coverage based on the most recent catch data available.

Existing IOTC measures establishing CPC-specific catch limits

Several IOTC CMMs establish, or provide for the future application of, CPC-specific catch limits for yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna and swordfish. These measures differ in their objectives, the basis used to determine the limits, their periods of application and the CPCs to which they apply. In all cases, the relevant Resolutions specify that the measures do not pre-empt or prejudice the future allocation of fishing opportunities. The following sections provide a brief overview of these measures and their current application.

Yellowfin tuna

Catch limits for yellowfin tuna were initially introduced as part of the interim rebuilding plan for the Indian Ocean yellowfin tuna stock. Resolution 19/01 established catch reductions for CPCs exceeding specified catch thresholds, with reductions differentiated by fishing gear and calculated principally relative to catches reported for 2014. Depending on the gear, CPCs exceeding the applicable thresholds were required to reduce catches by between 5% and 15%.

Resolution 21/01, effective from 1 January 2022, revised the rebuilding plan and established CPC-level catch limits based on historical catches and the characteristics and level of development of individual CPCs. CPCs exceeding specified historical catch thresholds are subject to reductions from reference catch levels, while limits are also established for CPCs with lower historical catches. The reference periods and applicable reductions vary according to the circumstances of the CPC concerned.

Resolution 21/01 was subject to objections from several CPCs following its adoption. Indonesia subsequently withdrew its objection in 2025. Resolution 19/01 therefore remains binding on I.R. Iran, Madagascar, Oman and Somalia, while Resolution 18/01 remains binding on India. Consequently, the YFT catch limits applicable until the entry into force of the new measure derive from different Resolutions depending on the CPC concerned.

Following the updated stock assessment in 2024, which indicated that the YFT stock was neither overfished nor subject to overfishing, the Commission adopted Resolution 26/01 *On establishing interim catch limits for yellowfin tuna in the IOTC Area of Competence*. The new Resolution therefore moves away from the previous rebuilding-plan framework towards an explicit TAC and CPC-specific catch-limit framework. It establishes an annual TAC of 436,867 t for 2027 and 2028. After 2028, this TAC will remain in place unless the Commission adopts a different TAC, with future TACs to be determined in accordance with a Management Procedure once adopted.

Under Resolution 26/01, CPCs are assigned to Categories A and B. Category A includes CPCs with specified individual catch limits, which collectively amount to 432,867 t, while 4,000 t is identified for Category B CPCs. The latter amount does not constitute a binding catch limit. Instead, Category B CPCs are subject to a trigger threshold of 3,000 t: where a Category B CPC exceeds this threshold in two consecutive years from 2027, it shall become a

Category A CPC and receive an individual catch limit, unless otherwise decided by the Commission. Changes to the overall TAC will result in proportional adjustments to the catch limits of Category A CPCs.

The Resolution also provides for the treatment of over- and under-catches and transfers between Category A CPCs. Over-catches are generally deducted at 100% from a subsequent catch limit, increasing to 125% where the limit is exceeded in two consecutive years. Up to 15% of an under-catch may be carried forward, and Category A CPCs may temporarily transfer part or all of their annual catch limit to another Category A CPC, subject to the provisions of the Resolution. Over-catches incurred in 2025 and 2026 under Resolutions 21/01 and 19/01 are also to be deducted from the respective CPC catch limits in 2027 and 2028.

Resolution 26/01 is expected to supersede Resolution 21/01 upon its entry into force. India and Somalia have objected to Resolution 26/01, and the Resolution is currently pending the extended objection deadline of 18 November 2026. The Resolution further provides that, if the sum of the catch limits of objecting Contracting Parties reaches or exceeds 15% of the TAC, the Resolution shall not enter into force. In that event, Resolution 21/01, or the previous rebuilding plans applicable to Contracting Parties that objected to Resolution 21/01, would remain in force.

Bigeye tuna

CPC-specific catch limits for bigeye tuna were established under Resolution 23/04 for 2024–2025, following the adoption of the BET Management Procedure (MP) under Resolution 22/03. Resolution 23/04 established an annual total allowable catch (TAC) of 80,583 t for 2024 and 2025, consistent with the output of the MP, and specified annual catch limits for seven CPCs. The Commission also requested Taiwan,China to limit its annual catch to 11,488 t.

CPCs not subject to an individual catch limit under Resolution 23/04 were encouraged to maintain catch and effort at their recent five-year average levels (2017–2021). The Resolution further provided that, where such a CPC caught more than 2,000 t in either 2024 or 2025, the Commission would consider establishing a binding catch limit from the management period commencing in 2026 if an allocation scheme had not yet been agreed and implemented.

Resolution 25/04 superseded Resolution 23/04 and establishes the BET catch limits for 2026–2028. In accordance with the BET MP, the annual TAC was increased to 92,670 t, and corresponding annual catch limits were established for eight CPCs. The Commission also requested Taiwan,China to limit its annual catch to 13,211 t. Mauritius was added to the CPCs with an individual catch limit, although its limit applies from 1 January 2028.

Resolution 25/04 provides for adjustments to individual limits through the deduction of over-catches, limited carry-over of under-catches and transfers of catch limits between CPCs. The Secretariat is required to prepare annually a table reflecting the applicable catch limits and any such adjustments and transfers. CPCs without individual catch limits are generally encouraged to maintain catch and effort at their 2019–2023 average levels. Where the catch of such a CPC exceeds 2,300 t in any two consecutive years from 2024 onwards, the Commission may consider establishing a binding catch limit if an allocation scheme has not yet been agreed and implemented.

India and Somalia objected to Resolution 25/04 and therefore remain bound by Resolution 23/04. Consequently, as for YFT, the applicable BET catch-limit framework is not identical for all CPCs.

Skipjack tuna

Resolution 25/03 establishes CPC-specific catch limits for skipjack tuna in conjunction with the MP adopted under Resolution 24/07. The Resolution establishes a TAC of 628,606 t for 2025 and 2026, with TACs for subsequent management periods to be determined in accordance with the MP. Following application of the MP in late 2025, the Scientific Committee recommended a reduced TAC of 565,745 t for 2027 (IOTC-2025-SC28-R, para. 212).

For the implementation of the catch limits, CPCs are divided into two categories based on their average catches during 2021–2023. Category A comprises nine CPCs for which individual annual catch limits are specified in the Resolution, amounting collectively to 615,633 t, while CPCs not listed are classified as Category B. Category A CPCs are required to progressively reduce their catches to the specified limits by 2028, with one-third of the required reduction implemented in the first year, two-thirds in the second year and the full reduction achieved in the third year. Mauritius is subject to specific provisions concerning the date from which its catch limit applies.

Changes in the TAC resulting from application of the MP are to be reflected proportionally in the catch limits of Category A CPCs. The Resolution also provides a mechanism for extending individual catch limits to other CPCs: where the catch of a Category B CPC exceeds 10,000 t in two consecutive years, that CPC shall be moved to Category A and receive a catch limit, unless otherwise decided by the Commission.

The Resolution also establishes provisions for the treatment of over- and under-catches. Over-catches are generally deducted at 100% from a subsequent catch limit, increasing to 125% where the limit is exceeded in two consecutive years, while up to 10% of an under-catch may be carried forward. The Secretariat is required to prepare annually the resulting table of catch limits, including relevant adjustments.

India, the Republic of Korea, and Somalia objected to Resolution 25/03 and are therefore not bound by its provisions. This is particularly relevant when assessing the coverage of the catch-limit framework, as India and the Republic of Korea are included among the Category A CPCs listed in Resolution 25/03 but their catches are not subject to the limits established by that Resolution.

Swordfish

Resolution 26/02 establishes interim CPC-specific catch limits for swordfish, following the adoption of the swordfish MP under Resolution 25/07. The Resolution establishes an annual TAC of 30,527 t for 2027 and 2028, in accordance with the MP. The catch limits therefore do not apply in 2026 and will enter into application from 2027.

Annual catch limits are specified for six CPCs: Sri Lanka, the EU, Indonesia, China, India and I.R. Iran. The Commission also requested Taiwan,China to limit its annual swordfish catch to 3,358 t in 2027 and 2028. CPCs not specifically identified in the Resolution are not subject to a binding catch limit.

The Resolution provides for adjustments to individual catch limits in cases of over- and under-catch. Over-catches are generally deducted at 100% from a subsequent catch limit, increasing to 125% where a CPC exceeds its limit in two consecutive years, while up to 10% of an under-catch may be carried forward. The Resolution also allows transfers of catch limits between CPCs, subject to the specified provisions, and requires the Secretariat to prepare annually a table reflecting the applicable catch limits and adjustments.

The Resolution also provides a mechanism through which additional CPCs may become subject to binding catch limits. Where a CPC not already subject to an individual limit catches more than 1,500 t on average over any two consecutive years from 2025 onwards, the Commission shall consider establishing a binding catch limit for that CPC if an allocation scheme has not yet been agreed and implemented.

The Resolution includes specific provisions concerning objections. If the combined catches of Contracting Parties objecting to the Resolution represent 15% or more of the TAC in any year, the CPC-specific catch limits cease to apply, pending review of the Resolution by the Commission.

Catch limits

Total catch limits

CPC-specific catch limits have been introduced progressively across species and therefore cover different periods. Limits were first established for yellowfin tuna under the rebuilding plans, followed more recently by bigeye and skipjack tunas, while the newly adopted swordfish limits will apply from 2027. The measures generally establish individual catch limits for CPCs accounting for the largest catches, while other CPCs remain outside the system of binding individual limits or are subject to specific thresholds and other provisions.

Annual limits may differ from the nominal limits specified in the relevant Resolutions as a result of adjustments for over- and under-catches. These adjustments were relatively small overall (Table **1** and Fig. **1**). For BET, SKJ and SWO, catch limits may also change between management periods following application of the respective MPs, as changes in the MP-derived TAC may result in corresponding adjustments to CPC-specific catch limits.

Tab. 1. Annual total catch limits (metric tonnes; t) computed for bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, swordfish and yellowfin tuna, 2022–2028. 'Fleets' indicates the number of CPCs and other fishing entities for which a catch limit applies

Name	Year	Fleets	Limit
Yellowfin tuna	2022	25	299,332
	2023	25	299,264
	2024	24	300,871
	2025	25	331,319
	2026	25	337,107
	2027	18	425,009
	2028	18	436,039
Bigeye tuna	2024	8	73,331
	2025	8	73,331
	2026	8	84,332
	2027	8	84,332
	2028	9	86,814
Skipjack tuna	2026	6	582,290
	2027	6	546,171
	2028	7	580,633
Swordfish	2027	7	27,658
	2028	7	27,658

For YFT, catch limits apply to a substantially larger number of CPCs than for the other three species and increase overall for 2027–2028 under Resolution 26/01. While no MP has yet been adopted for YFT, Resolution 26/01 calls for the development of an MP for consideration and adoption by the Commission at its annual Session in 2028.

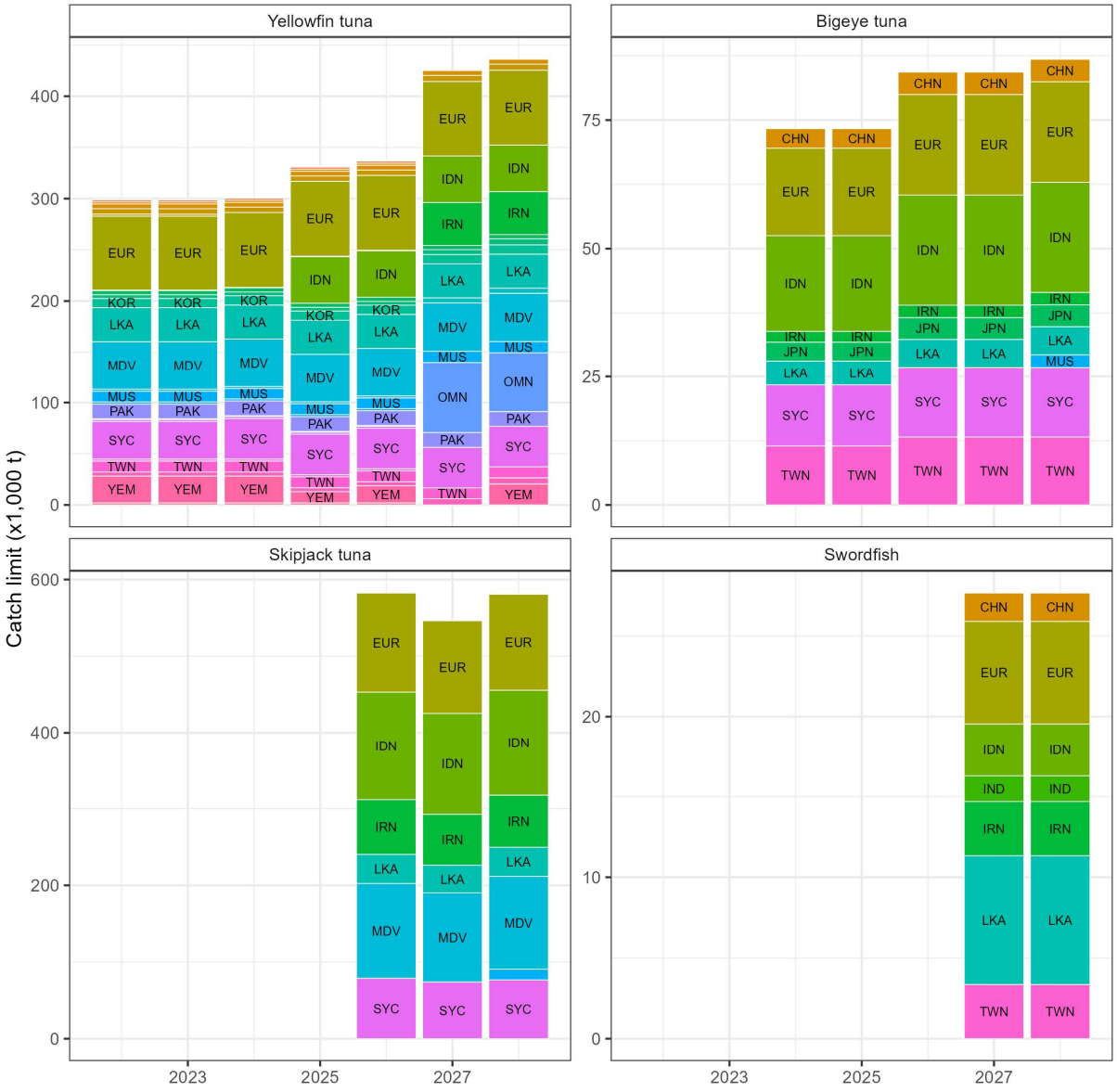


Fig. 1. Annual catch limits (metric tonnes; t) computed for bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna, swordfish and yellowfin tuna, 2022–2028. Fleet codes are displayed for catch limits representing at least 2.5% of the annual total for each species. Fleet codes are available from the IOTC Reference Data Catalogue

Limits vs. reported catches

Catch limits were compared with reported nominal catches for YFT over the period 2022–2025 and BET over 2024–2025. The comparison is expressed as the percentage of the applicable annual catch limit, with 100% indicating that reported catches were equal to the limit.

For YFT, reported catches generally remained within the applicable annual catch limits during 2022–2025, apart from one substantial over-catch and a few smaller instances of over-catch (**Fig. 2**). Under Resolution 21/01, over-catches are accounted for through adjustments to subsequent catch limits. Under the transitional provisions of Resolution 26/01, over-catches occurring in 2025 and 2026 will be deducted from the respective CPC catch limits in 2027 and 2028.

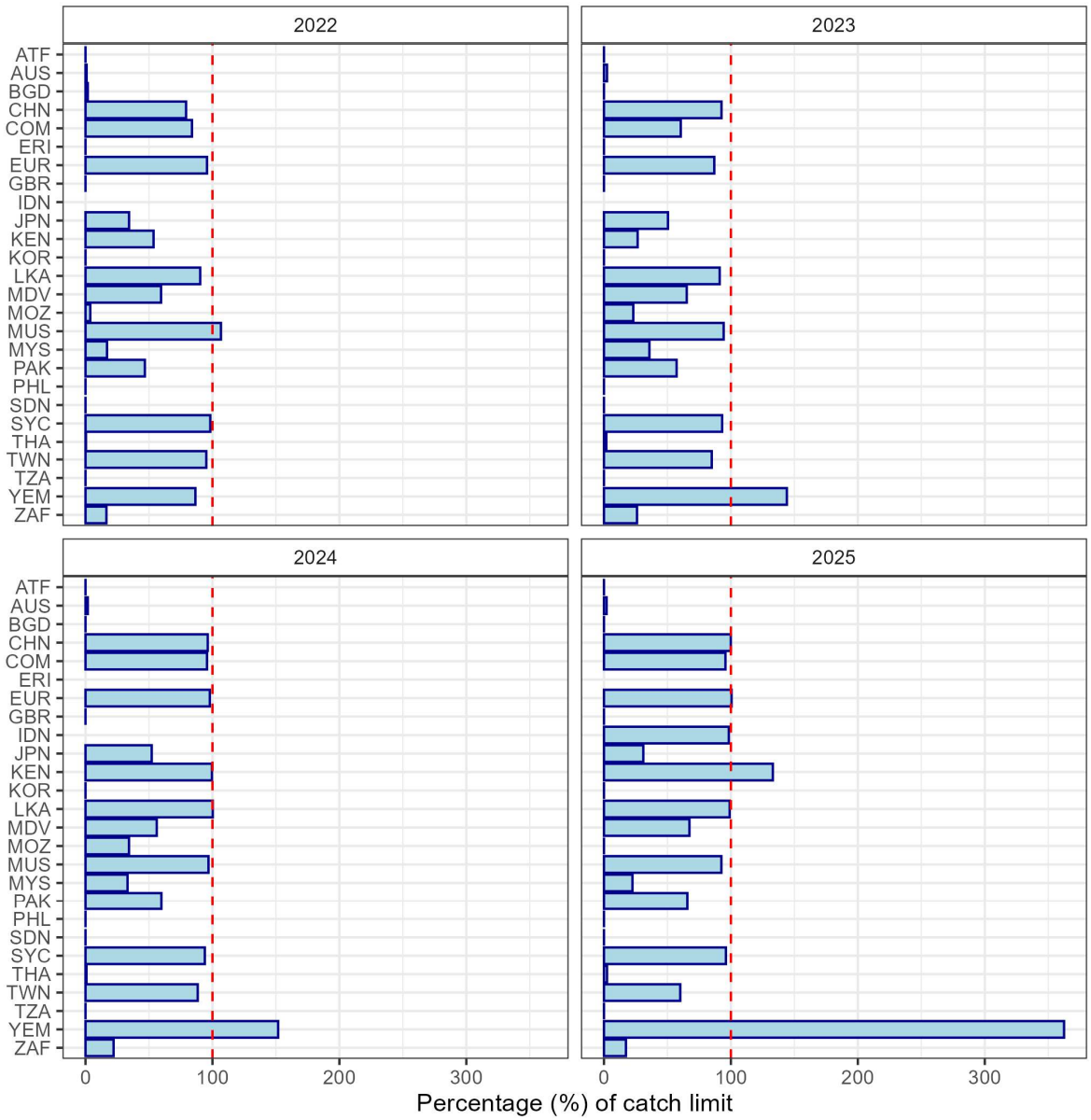


Fig. 2. Reported yellowfin tuna catches as a percentage of the applicable annual catch limits, by fleet, 2022–2025. The dashed line indicates 100% of the annual catch limit

For BET, reported catches generally remained within the applicable annual catch limits in both 2024 and 2025, with only a few small instances of over-catch observed (**Fig. 3**). Resolution 23/04 allowed CPCs subject to individual catch limits to apply a two-year management period for 2024–2025, whereby an under-catch in 2024 could be carried forward to 2025 and an over-catch in 2024 deducted from the 2025 limit. China informed the IOTC Compliance Committee that it would apply this provision; accordingly, its catches over the two-year period should be considered against its combined 2024–2025 catch limit. China's combined catch for 2024–2025 remained within its combined catch limit for the two-year period. For the other CPCs, the comparison presented here is therefore based on the annual catch limits.

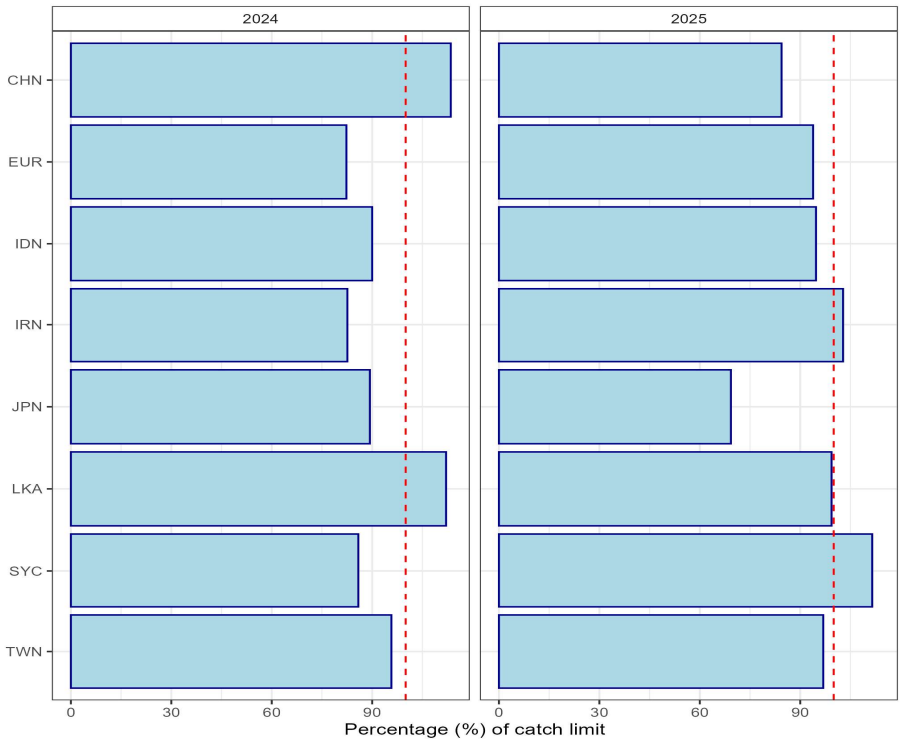


Fig. 3. Reported bigeye tuna catches as a percentage of the applicable annual catch limits, by fleet, 2024–2025. The dashed line indicates 100% of the annual catch limit. Fleet codes are available from the IOTC Reference Data Catalogue

Extent of catches subject to catch limits

For the purpose of assessing the extent of catches subject to catch limits, catches were classified into three categories: (A) catches by Contracting Parties and associated fishing entities (i.e., Taiwan,China) and other fishing entities subject to an individual catch limit under the applicable Resolution; (B) catches by CPCs not subject to an individual catch limit; and (C) catches by non-IOTC members.

2022-2025

For years for which catch data are available, the extent was calculated directly from reported nominal catches. For YFT, a substantial proportion of the catch remained outside the individual catch-limit framework, despite the relatively large number of fleets subject to individual limits. On average, 54.3% of the total YFT catch was taken by fleets subject to individual catch limits during 2022–2025 (**Fig. 4**, left panel). For BET, by contrast, the proportion of catch subject to individual limits was substantially higher, accounting for approximately three-quarters of the total catch during 2024–2025 (**Fig. 4**, right panel).

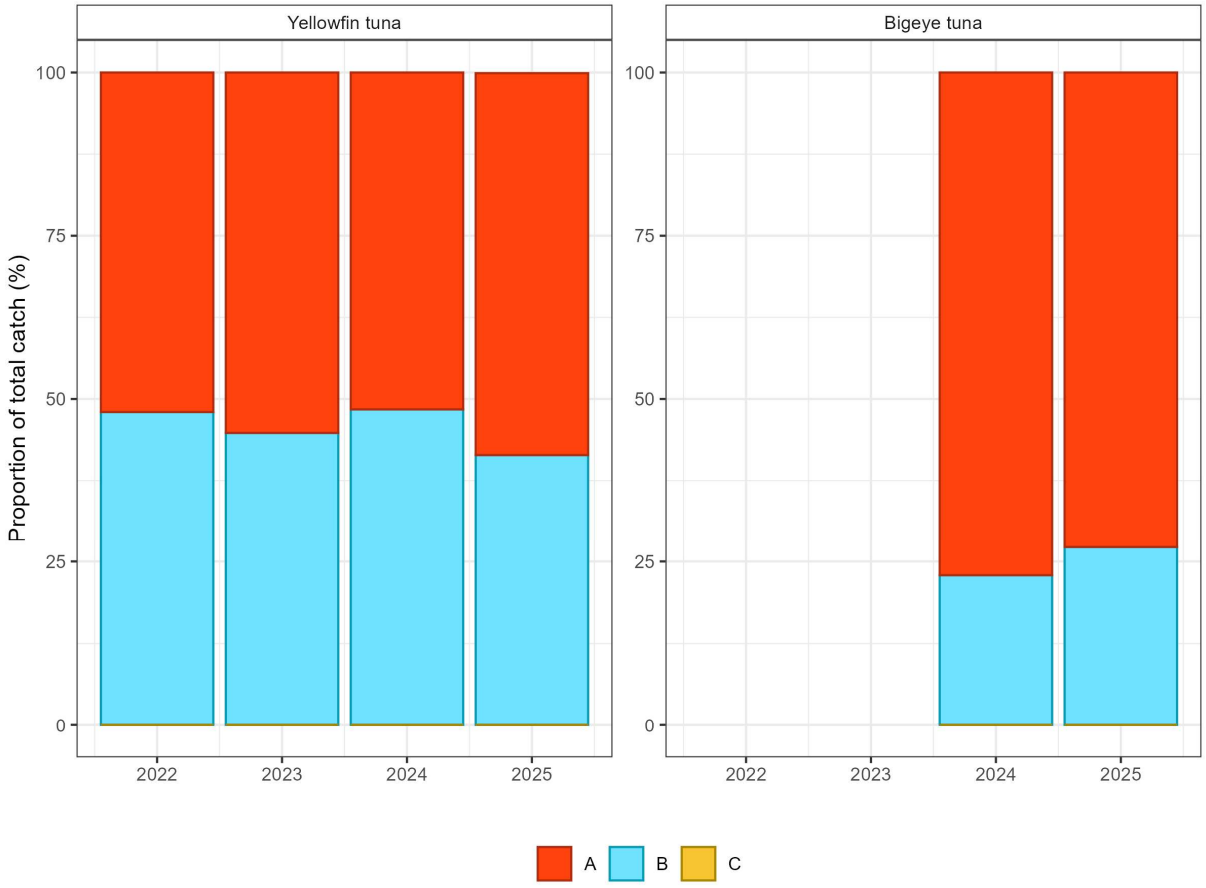


Fig. 4. Estimated proportion of total catches (%) of yellowfin and bigeye tunas by fleet category according to the applicability of individual catch limits, 2022–2025. Category A comprises fleets subject to individual catch limits; Category B comprises CPCs not subject to individual catch limits; and Category C comprises non-IOTC members. For bigeye tuna, results are presented for 2024–2025, corresponding to the period covered by the catch-limit framework considered in this analysis

2026–2028

To provide an indication of the expected extent of catches subject to individual limits in 2026–2028, the catch-limit framework applicable in each year was applied to the average distribution of catches among fleets during 2022–2025. These estimates assume that the relative distribution of catches among fleets remains similar to that observed in recent years and should not be interpreted as projections of future catches.

The estimated extent varies among species and years (**Fig. 5**). For YFT, approximately 64% of catches would be associated with fleets subject to individual limits in 2026. This proportion would increase to approximately 73% from 2027, reflecting the broader application of CPC-specific limits under Resolution 26/01, subject to its entry into force. Nevertheless, slightly more than one-quarter of recent catches would remain associated with fleets not subject to individual limits.

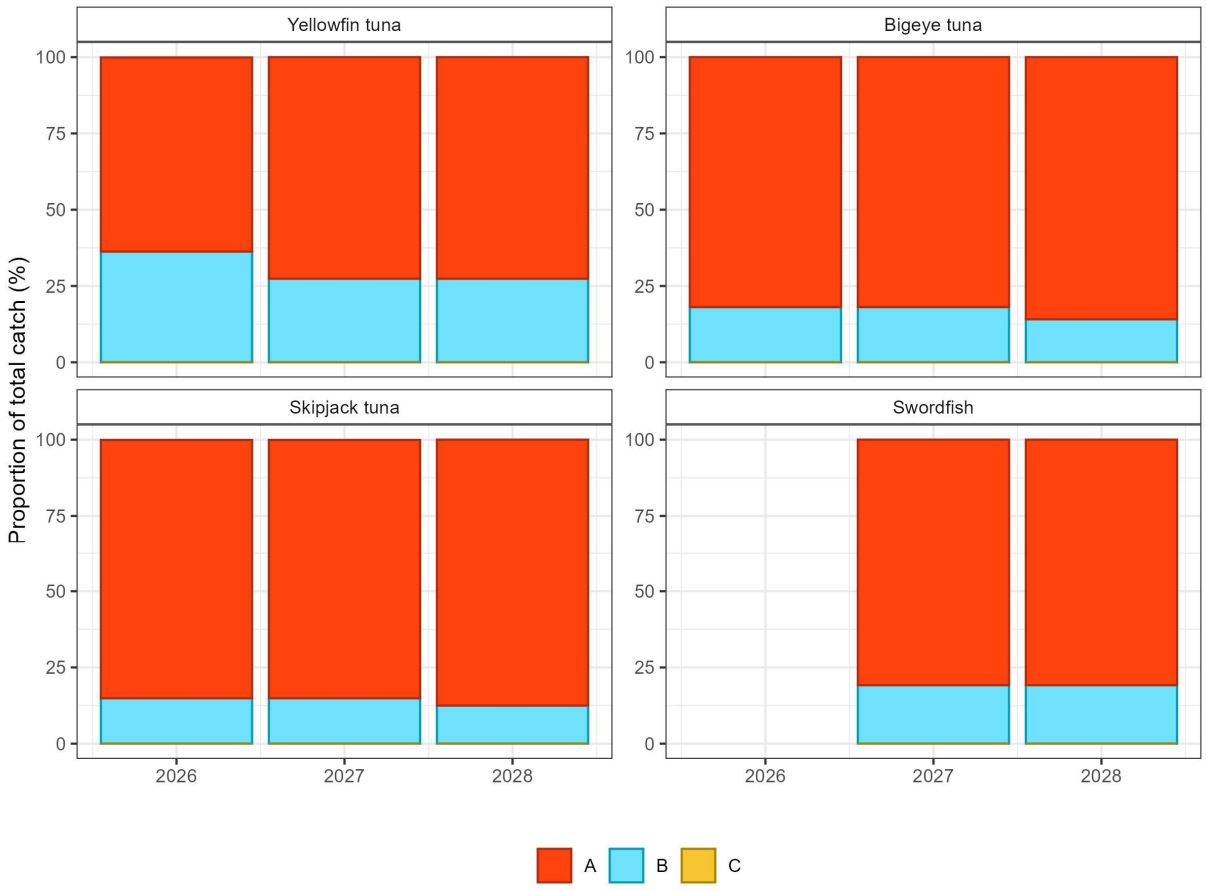


Fig. 5. Estimated proportion of total catches (%) of yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, skipjack tuna and swordfish by fleet category according to the applicability of individual catch limits, 2026–2028. Estimates are based on the average distribution of catches among fleets during 2022–2025 and the catch-limit framework applicable in each year. Category A comprises fleets subject to individual catch limits; Category B comprises CPCs not subject to individual catch limits; and Category C comprises non-IOTC members

For BET, the estimated extent is comparatively high, at approximately 82% in 2026–2027, increasing to around 86% in 2028, when the individual catch limit for Mauritius becomes applicable. For SKJ, approximately 85% of recent catches would be associated with fleets subject to individual limits in 2026–2027, increasing to close to 88% in 2028 when the individual catch limit for Mauritius becomes applicable. For SWO, no individual catch limits apply in 2026. Following the introduction of CPC-specific limits from 2027 under Resolution 26/02, approximately 80% of recent catches would be associated with fleets subject to individual limits.

Overall, once the recently adopted measures are in application, the estimated proportion of catch associated with fleets subject to individual limits would range from approximately 73% for YFT to around 88% for SKJ, based on the recent distribution of catches among fleets. Catches by non-IOTC members represent only a very small proportion of catches for all four species.